

Why am I not a Byzantinist?

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Must an article in a collection in honor of a scholar necessarily be scholarly? Is it not possible to break with tradition and write something personal—especially since this Festschrift is dedicated to a man to whom I have been bound in friendship for forty-five years? After such a period I hope I may set aside the etiquette of form without causing offense in order to offer some biographical, or semibiographical, notes. However, since the editors of this collection have not asked me to write about the life and work of Alexander Kazhdan, the only person about whom I can write with reasonable accuracy and knowledge is myself. Yet I believe that my account may be of some interest in a celebration of Kazhdan. In many ways my fate has been his fate: the fate of a generation of Soviet historians who began their careers soon after the Second World War.

I should start by explaining the question posed in the title. It arises because I in fact began my scholarly career—at least in the embryonic stage—as a Byzantinist, and my first mentor was Alexander Kazhdan. I suspect that he will not mind accompanying me on this journey back into our youth. I hope also that my non-Soviet colleagues will find this memoir of interest: the history of the Soviet intelligentsia, especially of its scholars, is as yet unwritten, and the number of witnesses declines inexorably each year.

It was a long time ago, and some details have probably slipped from my memory, but the overall picture of events is still clear. I begin with a small digression. Actually, my reminiscences consist mainly of digressions from the main point. Such, it seems, is the nature of the genre.

As a student of Moscow University, I found it very difficult to choose a field of specialization. I had been an “external” student: that is, I had followed a course while working elsewhere, and my attendance at the university itself had been epi-

sodic. I therefore barely knew any of the academic staff, yet had to choose in whose department I would be enrolled. My decision was aided by a chance episode which, as eventually became apparent, determined the course of my life. A girl in the class ahead of me gave me this advice: “Whatever you do later, you must first of all get good training. Sign up for Professor Neusyhin’s seminar in the Department of Medieval History. There’s no better teacher in the history faculty.” I had passed the examination in medieval history the previous year and had read a few books on the subject, so I took her advice and signed on with Professor Aleksandr Iosifovič Neusyhin.

In the 1940s the Department of Medieval History was without doubt the best in the faculty. It had distinguished scholars and fine, dedicated teachers. These were Russian intellectuals of the humane, humanist, and humanitarian tradition, who had kept their values intact despite the horrors of Soviet life in the twenties, thirties, and forties. Of course, there were genuine scholars and genuine *intelligenty* in other departments as well, but nowhere in such concentration.

The head of the department was Evgenij Alekseevič Kosminskij, the eminent specialist in the agrarian history of thirteenth-century England. His closest colleague and friend was a specialist in a later period of English history, Vladimir Mihailovič Lavrovskij. There were other agrarian historians: Aleksandr Iosifovič Neusyhin, who specialized in the Early Middle Ages, particularly the Frankish state and Germany, and Nikolaj Pavlovič Gracianskij, who had written on the history of Burgundy. Vera Veniaminovna Stoklickaja-Tereškovič lectured on the history of medieval towns; late medieval French history was taught by Sergej Danilovič Skazkin, Faina Abramovna Kogan-Bernštejn, and Boris Fedorovič Poršnev, whose works on seventeenth-century France are

still often cited today. Moisej Mendelevič Smirin taught fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German history.

The influence of these individuals on us was not only scholarly but also (perhaps mainly) ethical. Hovering over the department was the ghost of the late Dmitrij Moisevič Petruševskij, a major scholar, historian of England, author of *The Rebellion of Wat Tyler* and other works, a man whose writings exuded absolute integrity and independence of spirit—rare and precious qualities in those years. Petruševskij had taught both my teachers, Neusyhin and Kosminskij.

There were also younger lecturers. At the time their role was less obvious. Eventually some of them, the active promoters of the party line (Nina A. Sidorova, Aleksandr I. Danilov, Jurij M. Saprykin, Zinaida V. Udalcova, Aleksandr N. Čistozvonov), were to destroy the old department, which degenerated into the antithesis of its former self in both spirit and substance. This sad story is worth relating in more detail, but not here. For the moment I have digressed enough.

I enrolled in the seminars of Neusyhin and Kosminskij. Each had his peculiarities and strengths. Neusyhin was certainly better for the development of professional skills. He was generous with his time and enormously attentive to each of his students. His long delay in completing his doctoral thesis (that is, the second, higher research dissertation) was mainly due to his constant, active concern with undergraduates, research students, and young scholars. He taught us the subtleties of textual analysis and close reading.

Kosminskij was less involved in his students' work. He was more protective of himself and his time. He was first and foremost a researcher, and was less concerned with teaching. When he was elected to full membership of the Academy of Sciences, he became barely accessible. Most of the time he lived in his dacha away from the city (Stalin used to give dachas to academicians and writers, the official elite). But I gained much even from occasional contact with him, for I was learning from a major scholar. After a certain amount of hesitation I decided to write my final-year dissertation under his supervision. The topic was "Villeins on the Estates of Ramsey Abbey in the Thirteenth Century."

Once Kosminskij told me that he would like me to stay and do research under his supervision after I graduated; I was pleased and grateful. However, Kosminskij said he could only guarantee my ac-

ceptance as a research student if I abandoned the history of England for a field in which there was a "shortage" of scholars: the history of Byzantium.

In the decades preceding the revolution, Byzantine studies in Russia had flourished. Then the subject began to decline, and after the Second World War the situation was serious. Kosminskij was not a Byzantinist, but he was given responsibility for restoring the discipline. A Byzantine section was established at the Academy's Institute of History in Moscow. The situation was so dire that the authorities consented to hiring a Jew (during those years it was generally impossible for a Jewish scholar in the humanities to find employment in the capital). This Jew was Alexander Kazhdan. For many years Kazhdan had to teach in provincial colleges at Ivanovo and Velikie Luki, though his family and his home were in Moscow, and despite the fact that in Russia it is practically impossible to conduct serious research on medieval history in any libraries other than those of Moscow and Leningrad.

I was young, and I agreed to Kosminskij's proposal. "Byzantium it is," I thought. I began to learn classical Greek and to read the sources. Fairly soon I even translated and published one or two articles. And Kazhdan and I became friends. He gave me advice and guidance, and introduced me to the problems of Byzantine studies. He was still a research student and, like me, he was effectively without a supervisor: Kosminskij made no attempt or pretense at involvement.

In the autumn of 1946 I was to commence my postgraduate studies. The formalities of commencement lasted a full nine months. First I was accepted, then struck off the register, as were all other Jews, whose presence was regarded as cluttering and degrading Soviet historiography. This was a prelude to the tragic events of the struggle against "bourgeois objectivism" and "rootless cosmopolitanism." Later anti-Semitism could shield itself with the label "anti-Zionism," but then it had to clothe itself in a different disguise. The essence was the same.

I will not indulge in an analysis of the "higher considerations" which might have guided the mind of the "father of the peoples," Stalin. He probably needed a scapegoat. However, those who carried out his will—the local party functionaries, the academic bureaucrats, and researchers and university teachers—had clear motives. Apart from the desire to look zealous in the eyes of their bosses, or to point the finger at others before it was pointed

at them, their transparent goal was to grab someone else's good job and to advance their careers. They were not bothered by the means, and they rode roughshod over the unwritten moral code of the intelligentsia. There were many, many such scoundrels in academic and university life.

Professor Arkadij Sidorov (merely the first example who comes to mind) ran a smear campaign against academician Isaak Minc, who held a number of important posts. Sidorov saw to it that Minc was censured and dismissed, and that Minc's administrative posts passed to himself. I recall a conversation with Minc not long before this abrupt change in his life (I should say in parentheses that the change was temporary: some years later he was restored; I say nothing of his scholarly and other qualities, but Minc turned out to be "irrepressible"). The conversation was provoked by my own expulsion (along with many others) on the day after my enrollment as a postgraduate student. In the presence of a third party I expostulated to Minc: "This is overt anti-Semitism, and I protest." Among his other functions, Minc was then one of the official directors of the history section of the Academy of Sciences.

Some days later Minc summoned me to the editorial office (which he headed) of the *History of the Civil War*, and conversed with me on the subject of "friendship between peoples." The essence of his discourse was that there neither was nor could be anti-Semitism in our society. Soon afterwards, Minc himself was devoured by Sidorov and his cronies, and I remember with shame a feeling of gloomy satisfaction: as if I imagined that Minc would now be forced to realize how naive he had been. Of course, it was not a question of naiveté. Minc had simply wanted to avoid the possibility of being accused of admitting even tacitly, in the presence of a certain Gurevič, that anti-Semitism was possible in the Soviet Union. Naturally I should not have put him in this awkward position, but I was young and silly and inexperienced, and I was still outraged by injustice. Injustice became more familiar over the years. Thank goodness it never quite became habitual.

A fair number of scholars were expelled from the history faculty as the zealots pushed their way to the top. The Department of Medieval History lost professors Neusyhin and Kogan-Bernštejn. The dismissal of Neusyhin was an irreparable loss in itself, but soon Kosminskij, my other teacher, was also gone, despite the fact that he was a pure-blooded Slav. In effect Nina Sidorova took charge

of both the university department and the medieval section of the Academy's Institute of History, and the older professors were forced into the background.

This was the scene beginning to be played out (and as usual the future cast its shadow on the present) as I tried to enroll as a postgraduate student. I had passed the qualifying examination, and together with several of my contemporaries in the history faculty I was admitted, with recommendations from Kosminskij, Neusyhin, and others. As soon as I had been admitted as a postgraduate student, I was barred by the praesidium of the Academy of Sciences. The praesidium took as its excuse a decree relating to the Institute of History, but the decree on the Institute referred to the decision of the praesidium. It was a vicious circle, and there seemed no way out. There was also no work. Academician Kosminskij tried to take the matter to the president of the Academy, Sergej Ivanovič Vavilov (brother of the great geneticist Nikolaj Vavilov, who perished in Stalin's prisons), but Vavilov refused to receive him. The only recourse was a written complaint to the "highest authority." One could not predict how Stalin's secretariat would react. There had already been complaints from people who, like myself, had achieved the top grades in the qualifying examination and had received good references from the teaching staff, but who nevertheless had been refused access to postgraduate studies simply and obviously because they had Jewish surnames. Every complaint had been rejected "up there" as well, though the excuses were varied. Among those barred access was my friend's wife, Musya Kazhdan.

I was lucky. Vavilov unexpectedly summoned Kosminskij and gave permission for me to be registered for postgraduate studies. Somehow the letter had been effective. Such is the clemency of tsars: unpredictable and inexplicable in terms of the logic or motives of lesser beings.

A different interpretation becomes more apparent to me as I reflect on my subsequent life. Everyone has his fate, and I have been fated to be lucky. This good luck has ruled both my scholarly activities and my academic career. Many times it has been tested. Of all who were expelled, I alone was accepted back to conduct postgraduate research. Later, after completion of my thesis, when I was unable to settle in Moscow but found myself instead in Kalinin (the ancient Tver') teaching history in a pedagogical institute, the institute's director twice tried to have me removed from my job,

and on both occasions I managed to be reinstated. And this was at the start of the fifties, at the very worst period of the renewed campaign of anti-Semitism.

Often I was criticized for my articles and books. At meetings and in the press I was reviled as an anti-Marxist and revisionist. Yet the criticism always came *after* my work had been published. Of course there were difficulties, and I suffered because of the criticism, but I managed to publish all that I wrote, while several of my friends and colleagues suffered enforced silence through not being allowed to publish.

There are many examples of my luck.

In 1969 my book *Problems of the Origins of Feudalism in Western Europe* was with the publisher, when the Russian federation's minister of education, Aleksandr Danilov, addressed a large conference on historiography at Moscow University. Danilov was a medievalist and had been a pupil of Professor Neusyhin. In his address he attacked several of his colleagues as "structuralists." At the time this was seen as a political accusation. Soon afterward his address was published in *Kommunist*, the theoretical journal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. I was one of the main targets of his abuse, and after the article's appearance I was sacked from the Academy's Institute of Philosophy.

I wrote a sharp protest and was taken on at the Institute of History; one of the editors of *Kommunist* even asked me to write a piece for the journal about structural methods in historical research. I refused to collaborate with that journal. As for my book on the origins of feudalism: Danilov's criticisms had been directed at my earlier articles on the same topic, yet the chief editor at the Vysšaja Škola publishing house still had the courage to issue the book. Its appearance caused a furor. The head of Vysšaja Škola was removed from his post. The professors at the Department of Medieval History and the Department of Russian Feudalism unanimously condemned the book for its "anti-Marxism" and "subservience to bourgeois historiography." The book was banned for student use. I could hardly have planned a better advertisement for my work!

Another example of my luck concerns my book *Categories of Medieval Culture*. It has been translated into many languages, though only by chance does it exist at all. The manuscript was being edited when the Iskustvo publishing house came under new management. A new boss was appointed, and

his first action was to demand to see manuscripts, virtually all of which he then banned. He asked about my manuscript, but the young woman who was editing it answered: "Gurevič's book is already at the printers." In fact the manuscript was still in the drawer of her desk. The new boss did not press the matter, and the book was published. I am fated to be lucky.

All of that was in the future.

In the spring of 1947 I registered as a research student, specializing in the history of Byzantium. This, indeed, was the field of my first academic skirmish. I had been studying Procopius' *Secret History*, and I came to dispute the theory advanced by some Soviet Byzantinists that conflict between circus factions under Justinian was an expression of "class struggle." The accepted idea was that the blues and the greens represented different classes in Byzantine society, and that this was the explanation for the Nika riots. An unprejudiced reading of the sources leaves little doubt that the theory was conjured up out of thin air. I claim no special merit in writing about its precariousness. But I well remember the indignation of established Byzantinists, who viewed my criticisms as an attempt to undermine the "finest achievements" of "progressive" Marxist Byzantine studies. Naturally my article was not published.

There was a different response to my analysis of funerary inscriptions from the Byzantine cemetery at Korykos in Asia Minor. Kazhdan had suggested the theme. To write about how many artisans were buried there, to categorize them by profession—this brought praise.

Before long, however, the study of Byzantine history started to arouse in me an ever intensifying dislike, even a kind of melancholy. To explain this, I must indulge in another digression.

I have already mentioned that in my first few years at the university I had only the vaguest idea of what I actually wanted to do: my arrival at the Department of Western Medieval History was in large measure fortuitous, accidental. Now I must explain *why* I did not know which area of history I wished to study.

The impression of indecision is not entirely accurate. I did have very specific intentions. I considered that the most important subject for research, and the subject in which the least research had been conducted, was the Soviet period of Russian history, and above all the history of the Communist Party. I put considerable effort into collecting the stenographic records and minutes of the post-

revolutionary party congresses. In the forties and fifties such documents were almost classified as forbidden literature. I seriously intended to delve more deeply into these topics, because I felt that one could only understand the gloom of Soviet life in Stalin's latter years if one first understood the dramatic upheavals endured by the people and the party over the whole of the post-revolutionary period. I had preliminary conversations with some other students at the university. Together we wanted to form a discussion group devoted to this theme.

The group was never founded. If it had been, we probably would not have retained our freedom, or indeed our lives. The state security services kept vigilant watch over everybody, but especially students, and punishment was severe even when their suspicions were empty.

I quickly learned that my dream was unrealizable. I could not have performed the spiritual contortions necessary to study the "official" party history, and under no circumstances could I have actually brought myself to join the ruling party. To conduct research in private was difficult and dangerous, and most of the essential sources had either vanished or were kept under lock and key.

And so I became a medievalist.

The closer I studied Byzantine history, the more I came to suspect that I was studying something already familiar to me: that in another place and at another time, with different names and in a different language, this was the same history that had been endured and was still being endured in my own country.

Like most people of my upbringing and milieu, I had always considered myself to be culturally European, or part of the synthesis of West European and Russian culture. Each of these traditions had peculiarities and distinctive qualities, but I had never found any irreconcilable contradiction between the two. Russian culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was deeply indebted to the West, and the luminaries of Russian culture always saw this clearly. The best of Russian culture had always been part of European culture.

Here I should point out that I never felt my Jewishness until the anti-Semites in positions of administrative authority began to stress: "You are not a Russian. You belong to a second-rate category of person. You ought not to be given employment alongside us, nor should you be allowed the status of a research student." It was difficult for them, poor souls. They could not say any of this overtly,

and those who would have denied me the most basic civil rights were obliged to twist their reasoning and to devise all kinds of pretexts.

In those years Great Russian chauvinism and national intolerance were fostered from above. There was a myopic and deeply harmful isolationist campaign against the "fetishization of foreignness." Foreign words were banned; scientific discoveries and inventions were attributed to Russians. Radio, trains, and the airplane—all were said to have originated in Russia. Printing was even claimed to have been invented in Kievan Rus'. There was a somber catch phrase among us: "Russia, homeland of the elephants." Several portraits of great Western composers were removed from the great hall of the Moscow Conservatoire, to be replaced with portraits of Dargomyžskij and Glinka, whose works (though fine in their way) were almost never performed at the concerts in that hall. A kind of Great Wall of China was erected around native Russian culture, and within this ghetto all that was fresh and independent and alive was persecuted.

Today the phrase "homeland of the elephants" sounds like light humor; then it was also frightening. The relentless attempts to cut our people off from the West—from the whole of world culture—were oppressive. We were prevented from finding out about the best new achievements in science, philosophy, and social thought, and about new works of art and literature. The nation was being condemned to provincialism and backwardness. If any form of verbal and visual art did not fit the criteria of a narrowly defined realism, it was attacked as "formalist" and therefore "hostile to the people," and so was banned and persecuted. The Moscow Museum of Modern Western Art, with its valuable stock of pictures that had been acquired by private patrons and collectors before the revolution, was closed. Many of its masterpieces were sold abroad. The best composers, like Shostakovich, were vilified as "formalists, cut off from the people."

In such an environment, historical scholarship did not escape scrutiny. The bureaucrats of the Academy and the university became obsessed with the fear of the influence of "bourgeois ideology." I witnessed the public humiliation of Professor Isaak Zvavič: Nikonov, son-in-law of the foreign minister, Molotov, actively participated in it. The show had been prepared in advance and was fearsome to watch: shameless careerists heaping wave after wave of insults and accusations upon a histor-

ian already willing to confess his alleged ideological errors.

One result of such persecutions was the triumph of ignorance. Even in the Department of Medieval History students and postgraduates had no access to the writings of such Western historians as Huizinga, Lucien Febvre, and Marc Bloch. Even the names were unknown. They were unknown not only in the late forties and early fifties, but also much later. I remember how I once referred to *The Waning of the Middle Ages* at the Institute of History in the mid-sixties during a lecture on social psychology and history. Academician Skazkin was in the chair, and he leant over to me and said softly: "Huizinga is splendid." But immediately afterward, in his summary of the discussion of my lecture, he rejected the very idea of psychological factors affecting history. He was afraid. And he had good cause: his favorite student had once been arrested and exiled for studying Catholicism. In the discussion of my lecture A. N. Čistozvonov declared that my topic had long been of interest to "specialists at the Pentagon." To call this a "discussion" is a gross abuse of language.

The isolation from the outside world started in the late forties. As we read the memoirs of West European travelers to Russia—Marquis de Custine, for example—we were sadly surprised at how little the country seemed to have changed. In particular, we well recognized the psychology of the rulers and the ruled. We had the same experience when reading Gogol'. The town of Glupov in Saltykov-Ščedrin's *History of a Town* seemed to be taken from real life a century ahead of its time.

Some cultural stereotypes are inherited from the very distant past. One might have thought that the revolutions of the early twentieth century would have shaken the very foundations of our culture, leaving in place not one stone of the edifice of the earlier way of life. But then came the restoration under Stalin, and everything fell back into place: ministers, officers' uniforms, the *gener-alissimus*. Even the old psychological habits were revived: servility, the worship of rank, slavish obsequiousness and compliance, the lack of principle, the absolute lack of any sense of honor or human dignity. These qualities were revealed at all levels of the party, state, and social hierarchy.

Of course it is easy to talk about it now. We have become emancipated from our fear. But then it was all too simple to crush human dignity under an ever-thickening layer of fear. It was a viscous kind of fear. It stuck to us, kept reminding us of

its presence, even when there seemed to be no reason for it.

Fear was not all. The history of Russia did not nurture and produce a civic society, individuals with a sense of social responsibility. Outside a very restricted (Western-oriented) group, it did not produce people with a developed sense of individual dignity. The idea of individual worth was supplanted by the herdlike feeling of belonging to larger, suprapersonal groupings. Any behavior that subordinated the individual to the mass was approved, encouraged, and praised as correct. It was during these years that the ritual words "Party" and "Motherland" began to be written with capital letters—just as the name of the leader was uttered with an ecstatic little sigh.

The divine aura of the leader—not just Stalin, but some of his successors as well—was not produced merely by propaganda and political trickery. The phenomenon is more profound. In this system of consciousness, power indeed acquires sacramental potency. Hence the cult of Lenin, analogous to that of the holy monarch and heavenly protector. The embarrassing cult of his remains in the mausoleum takes us back to the age of the Egyptian Pharaohs or, less remotely, to the age of reverence for saints' relics. This was not achieved merely through the political designs and strategies of the party bosses, who only recently (I write in the summer of 1989) regarded as sacrilegious a proposal to bury the earthly remains of the founder of the party and the state. For many decades endless queues of ordinary pilgrims have gone to the mausoleum! Apparently socialist society needs holy relics at its center. We should marvel not at the phenomenon itself, but at the fact that the remains work no wonders!

To repeat: the study of the history of Byzantium gradually began to provoke in me a feeling of inner protest. Models of behavior so typical of certain periods in Russian history obviously do not arise as a response to the Tatar yoke alone: together with the faith and the culture they are inherited from Byzantium.

This is particularly apparent in the relationship between the state and the church that was established in the East Roman Empire, whence it was transferred to Rus'. It is utterly different from the relationship between secular and spiritual authority in the West: not the equilibrium, opposition, and interaction of two powers, but the servility of the spiritual leaders in the face of the state. This total dependence of the church on the state re-

mained constant throughout Russian history, regardless of any changes in the social structure. Of course, there were exceptional individuals and exceptional groups of individuals who had the courage not to succumb, but the Orthodox Church as a whole, as an institution, has always performed, and continues to perform, a specific function in the system of social control over the subjects of the state.

No less striking is the difference between the eastern and western relationship between the state and the towns. Early Byzantine towns were in all respects far in advance of West European towns as wealthy centers of trade, manufacturing, and civilization; yet they were eventually suffocated by imperial and local administrations—at the very time when the free town-communes of the West were establishing their place in political and economic life as the centers of that unprecedented ferment of activity and development which placed the West in the vanguard of world history.

Many years ago Alexander Kazhdan proposed his theory of a particular kind of Byzantine “individualism” characterized by a high level of vertical social mobility through which an ordinary citizen could attain high office and even (as occasionally happened) end up on the throne. The mobility operated in both directions, and could allow a man to fall as well as to rise: on one not-so-fine day a mag-nate could find himself stripped of his power, position, possessions, freedom, and even his life. Some families and clans rose to the fore, others sank into the background. Today an emperor gazes down upon his prostrate, fawning slaves; tomorrow he may be put to death, or blinded, castrated, and exiled to a distant monastery.

The story is familiar. This is an odd sort of “individualism.” It has nothing in common with the individualism that was emerging at the same time in the medieval West. It lacked what lay at the core of western individualism; it was an individualism without any sense of, or acknowledgment of, the individual! It was not founded on respect for the rights of the individual, rights that derived from that person’s social status. Such status was guaranteed in the corporate principle, which was vastly stronger and more developed in western than in eastern Europe.

I am convinced that feudalism existed only in the West, not in Byzantium or in Rus’. To call the social structures of Byzantium or Rus’ “feudal” is to stretch the term. The main characteristic of real feudalism lay in the acknowledgment that every

member of the social hierarchy—from monarch to petty knight and even to the dependent peasant—had a specific set of duties and rights as defined by law or custom. The performance of these duties and the exercise of these rights served as a kind of safeguard for the status of each individual. Feudalism is based not on arbitrary rule but on a structure of legitimate relationships, and in normal circumstances legitimacy is maintained and observed. Such, at any rate, is the social and legal framework, the implicit system of values: in real life, of course, any number of violations could take place.

I am aware that not all will accept my assertion that feudalism existed only in the West. Universal agreement would be too much to expect: everything rests on the definitions that historians choose to apply. I recall one definition in particular, which is not exhaustive and perhaps is now a source of mild discomfort even for its originator, Georges Duby. With his profound knowledge of the social and economic aspects of feudalism, Duby still chose to define feudalism as a particular type of mentality, a state of mind. He was right. That was precisely what it was.

And so I ask myself: can one imagine a Magna Charta in Byzantium or in Rus’? Is it conceivable that a Byzantine emperor or a Russian tsar could view himself, or might be viewed by others, as *primus inter pares*? Or that a peasant serf in Russia might have taken a complaint against his master to the state court—a right enjoyed by English villeins as early as the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? The actual likelihood of success or failure in such an action is wholly irrelevant to the argument: the important point is the principle that at least allowed for the possibility of such appeals to the crown courts. As to whether one can imagine a Canossa in eastern Europe—the very question is absurd. In fact all these questions are absurd: one might just as well ask whether in the Russia of Ivan the Terrible (or, for that matter, of Peter the Great) there were any Russian gentlemen.

Such propositions are obviously incongruous and even improper. We are dealing with two separate cultures, two distinct religious and political traditions, and therefore dissimilar types of underlying mentality.

Perhaps not everything was quite as clear to me in 1947, but I already had a strong sense of the contrast. I felt that I was dealing with topics and phenomena which were not lost in the distant past, but which—albeit with new labels—retained a puzzling vitality and tenacity. One could not

openly write or speak of such things. So I yearned to return to my Anglo-Saxons.

I made up my mind to approach Academician Kosminskij with a request that I be allowed to leave Byzantium and return to the British Isles. It was a curious interview. On normal (and infrequent) visits to my supervisor my first duty would be to inquire about his health. He would speak slowly, and these conversational preliminaries sometimes dragged on so long that the academician's wife (not a particularly pleasant lady, as I guiltily recall) would interrupt and announce: "Young man, you are making Evgenij Alekseevič tired." Embarrassed by her intrusion, he would reply: "Nadežda Nikolaevna, we're talking business."

However, on this occasion the interview went quite differently. Before I could open my mouth to ask whether I could emigrate from Byzantium, Kosminskij announced: "I would like you to return, after all, to the history of medieval England." And thus it was.

Over the forty years since that conversation I studied the social history of England, then the history of Norway and Iceland, and the early history of the Germans and of the Franks. Eventually I realized the necessity of studying the history of culture and mentality: one cannot understand a

system of social relations and functions unless one knows something of the consciousness and of the emotional life of the people of that society. But in order to penetrate even a small distance into the mentality, one must have a measure of sympathy, of fellow feeling. In other words, one must have something in common with such people, must understand their system of values. I personally find it easier to enter into such a dialogue with peoples who profess the Latin form of Christianity (be they inhabitants of France, England, or Norway) than with the people of Byzantium.

That is why I am not a Byzantinist.

However, none of this in any way lessens my admiration for scholars who are courageous enough to enter into the mysteries of Byzantine history: perhaps such people manage to overcome their own personal inclinations and sympathies; or perhaps they have been given a talent that enables them to see what I am unable to discern.

It is probably my misfortune that I cannot exert myself to overcome personal sympathies and antipathies, to approach such topics of study without anger or prejudice. I lack precisely that higher objectivity which is an essential quality of any major historian and for which Alexander Kazhdan is justly distinguished. *Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*

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Translated from the Russian by Simon Franklin.